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Mirca Madianou and Daniel Miller, *Migration and New Media: Transnational Families and Polymedia* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 175pp., ISBN 978-0-415-67928-2, £22.99 paperback.

Migration and new Media is a volume 'dedicated to the understanding of this new type of "connected transnational family" which is the result of two phenomena: migrant transnationalism and the explosion of communicative opportunities afforded by new media' (Madianou and Miller 2011, p.1). Working in the tradition of social anthropology, the volume is the result of a research project studying social relations by means of long-term ethnographic engagement. The case study through which Madianou and Miller reflect upon 'migration', 'media' and 'families' is that of Filipino women living and working in London and Cambridge and their children left-behind in the Philippines. The broader aim of the volume is to shed light on the unprecedented phenomena of migrant transnationalism and new media communications together with a reflection and theorization upon the very nature of parent-child relationships.

Certainly this case study is full of sad stories of longing and pain along with accounts of unfair experiences typical of the 'Global South' and the political economy of global work. But rather than a romanticized account of migration that highlights the inescapable oppressions and unfairness confronted by these families, throughout the volume Madianou and Miller dignify their informants by spelling out the ambivalences and contradictions of their choices. For example, when accounting for the reasons for migration, Madianou and Miller identify normative goals such as paying for children's education, building a house for their families, escaping violence, relationship breakdown, or the search for self-improvement. So we are introduced to a series of migrant women who we are told establish relations that are different (due to their immigrant status and their cultural values, among other factors), but also very similar to the 'cultural contradictions of motherhood' (Hays 1997) in which working mothers negotiate a plurality of roles and identities. In Madianou and Miller's case studies this plurality is played out across distances.

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**Marjorie Murray** Book Review: *Migration and New Media: Transnational Families and Polymedia* by **Mirca Madianou** and **Daniel Miller**

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With these ambivalences in mind the reader travels from the UK to the Philippines getting acquainted with a textured analysis of the ‘mediated relationships’ between mothers and their children; meaning, firstly, relationships that are mediated by media (as opposed to co-present ones). This study of relationships and the media placed at same level in which neither is the context of the other (Miller and Slater 2000) constitute the heart of the volume, and the pivot for their theoretical elaborations. The authors first concentrate on the affordances and limitations of different old and new media as intrinsic to the achievements and failures of these relationships. They show us how mothers and children have always identified and selected different media for particular communication aims: cassette tapes were believed to be powerful because of the immediacy of the voice, while letters appeared as more ‘personal’, following a logic of craft, dedication and devotion (Madianou and Miller 2012, p.57). They then analyse the present times of diversified affordable media - including email, webcam, texting, social networking or phone calls, in which each medium may only be defined relationally; each medium stands as an alternative to other media that could be used for that message. Hence, every selection is a communicative and a moral act to be judged along cultural forms of sociality, temporality, power and emotion. This is the new polymedia environment in which Filipino mothers and their children redefine relationships in novel ways. Madianou and Miller show us how in this new environment mother and children may consolidate a range of close, supportive relationships aided by the quasi ‘immediacy’ for example of the webcam. However, failures, offenses and even break ups may also proliferate along etiquette misunderstandings or other misuses of the media, as in the case of a left-behind child who was ‘befriended’ by his mother in the social networking site Friendster and exposed to detailed information regarding his mother’s lifestyle in London, which he reproached.

These kinds of situations - which are specific to their informants yet somehow familiar to any reader who makes use of media communication in relationships - are the basis upon which, in their concluding section, Madianou and Miller reflect upon the nature of ‘mediated relationships’. By focusing on mediation the authors develop a theoretical discussion in which they conclude that mediation, considered dialectically, takes place in various directions. In the first place, rather than thinking of relationships as just mediated by media, relationships should be considered as intrinsically mediated in nature. Their case study of long term, long distance,

relationships provides extreme examples of the problems that people confront in co-presence (or 'less mediated relationships', taking into account what the authors identify as a misleading idea of media as layering closeness and distance). Drawing on Miller's previous work (1997, 1998, 2007) they suggest that any relationship consists of a theoretical triangle; the normative expectations regarding the role the other fills (the 'mother'), the actual individual filling the role and the discrepancy between these two. Following cultural, normative patterns, the child builds an idea of the mother (and vice versa)— a projection, who he or she then measures against the actual person (the mothers in the UK), negotiating and working upon the attainment of a match or closeness between them. This triangle is particularly evident in the case of long-distance relationships, in which the normative ideal may emerge much more distanced from the actual person. But there is nothing like reportage. In every conversation, the authors suggest, 'there is the attempt to make the person at the other end more cognisant of how the person at this end would like them to be and how they should really want this for themselves' (Madianou and Miller 2011, p.148). Secondly, they argue that media communications are mediated by relationships, as observed in the selection of different media for different aims in the context of polymedia. Finally, the mutual mediation between relationships and the media underlies the process of migration that they account for in the volume.

This volume is successful in several fronts. It is an original and compelling piece that manages to trespass a range of established disciplinary boundaries (migration, media, kinship studies), articulating and enriching various ongoing debates about the breadwinning/caregiving tension among migrant women, and the recent advances in theories of mediation in media studies and anthropology. Its didactic style (including summaries at the end of each chapter) and the balanced catenation of case studies complement its provocative content. Readers concerned with the contradictions and ambivalences of motherhood will encounter a set of novel reflections in line with the authors' elaboration of mediated relationships. I found Madianou and Miller's accounts of the negotiations and administration of mediated closeness and distance, presence and absence by mothers and children particularly interesting. The authors describe how these are redefined along changing normative criteria, and projections in different times of the relationship. Similarly media oriented readers will encounter novel contributions including the thesis that polymedia unfolds in a context of 'resocialization of the media' (Madianou and Miller

2012: 139), in which people have regained control over technologies in ways that current theories do not seem to account for. Madianou and Miller's strategy is risky, considering the range of topics and debates they get involved in, and yet it is convincing. The result is a groundbreaking work that will be of interest for readers studying motherhood, media, kinship and relationships inside and outside of anthropology.

## References

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